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STAT

P E R I S C O P E

His Own Star Wars

The White House faces yet another embarrassment over former national-security adviser John Poindexter. By law, the three-star admiral will revert to two-star status unless—within 90 days of his leaving the NSC post—President Reagan recommends him to the Senate for a new three-star job. Poindexter can't even retire with three stars unless the president and Senate concur. Navy officials recently suggested that Poindexter relinquish his third star to avoid putting Reagan on the spot, but sources say he refused. "It would seem self-incriminating for him not to fight to keep his three-star status," says a friend. Poindexter's clock began ticking in early December, following his

resignation, so Reagan would have to seek Senate confirmation of the admiral's rank in March, just prior to the start of Iran-contra hearings. "If the president feels Poindexter served him loyally despite any mistakes of judgment, it would be unfair to deny him his three-star status," said one Reagan aide. "If he sends the recommendation to the Hill, people will say it's a whitewash"—or an effort to discourage damaging testimony.

New CIA Director Robert M. Gates got the job in large part because his ailing predecessor, **William Casey**, was so set on it. When chief of staff Donald Regan and Attorney General Edwin Meese visited Casey in the hospital on Jan. 29—the



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Status struggle: Poindexter

only time since his brain surgery—they hoped he'd resign but wanted him to feel comfortable about it. So when Casey asked that Gates get the post, they were happy to oblige. Gates was already a strong contender, said a White House aide, "but Casey's say-so tipped the scales entirely in his favor."